

# Mechanization

Technological advances in the early part of the 20th century centered around mechanical innovation and improvements. Farmers were constantly looking for more efficient and reliable sources of power to run their farm operations. As a result, machines gradually replaced horses and mules on the farm. The steam engine was in use early in the century, but proved to be too expensive and cumbersome for most farmers. A cheaper and smaller alternative to the steam engine was desired.

The gasoline-powered tractor was developed to fill this need and farmers began adopting this technology around 1910. The early tractors were quite large and were still not practical for smaller farms. As a result, the widespread use of tractors did not take place until lighter and less expensive tractors became available around 1915.



Improvements in design during the 1920's allowed farmers to use tractors during cultivation in addition to plowing, further increasing their appeal.

The use of the internal combustion engine was not limited to tractors. Farmers began to make full use of other machinery, such as trucks and self-propelled harvesting equipment that was being developed in the first half of the century. The manufacture and use of farm machinery increased steadily until the 1960's, when it leveled off. This leveling off indicated a shift away from mechanical technological advances in the second half of the century toward a new emphasis on the biological and chemical sciences, and on improved management practices.

Farm Mechanization: 1900 - 1997

